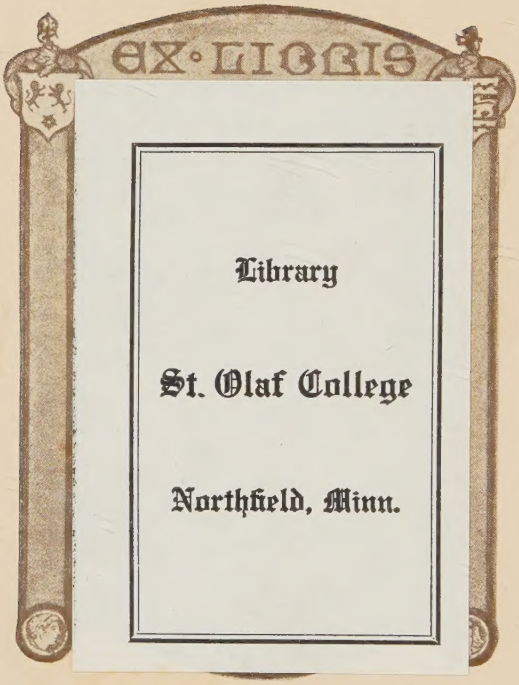
Dr. HENRY COWARD

THE PIONEER CHORUS-MASTER



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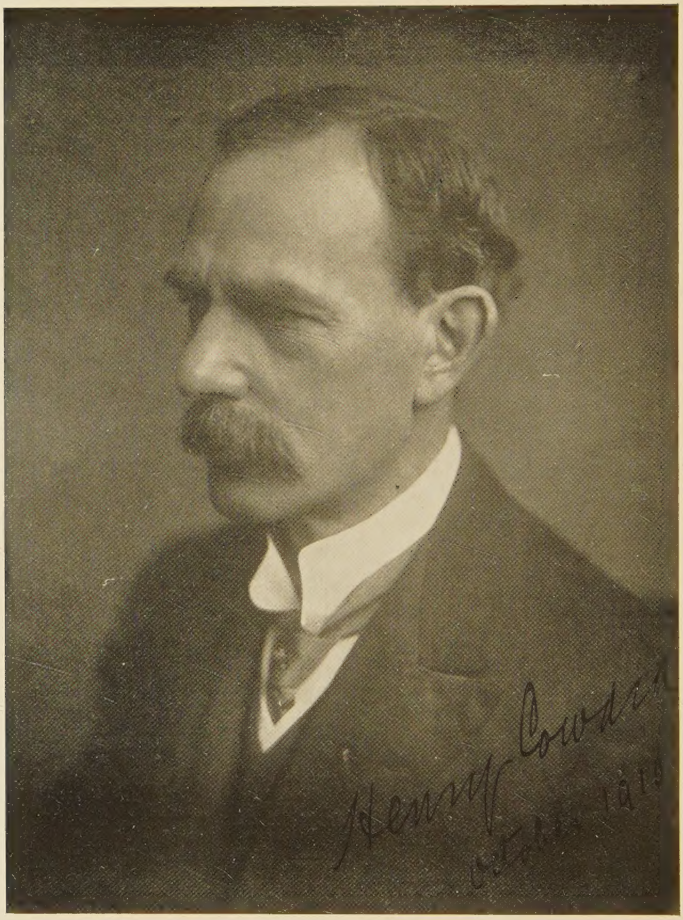
Dr. HENRY COWARD



DR. HENRY COWARD
(Photo. by Annan & Sons, Glasgow)

DR. HENRY COWARD

THE PIONEER CHORUS-MASTER

BY

J. A. RODGERS

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CHAPTER I

THE MAN

If the reader will study, for a few minutes, the portrait facing the title-page of this volume, he will find there an index to the character of the man whose life-story and achievements form the theme of the subsequent pages. The features betoken the strong man owning a purposeful and inflexible will; they are ascetic, indicating a temperate life; they bear the habitual frown of one who has studied long and deeply. In repose, the face is stamped with the trace of many years of toil, of hardships and material privations endured in the pursuit of a fixed ambition. But if the face be stern, like the front of some dark-browed cliff, they who know the man, can speak of softer aspects of his character—genial as sun-kissed vineyards—warmed by the glow from a generous and friendly heart, fresh with the

sincerity of a simple nature and enlivened by a kindly humour.

Cheeriness and energy are the two chief externals which strike a casual acquaintance, meeting Dr. Henry Coward for the first time. His laugh is free and loud, his step has the spring of youth, his figure is trim and erect. His voice, though hardened by the wear and tear of rehearsals, has lost none of its ring and authority. He is swift in movement, hearty in manner ; he grips the hand and meets the eye with the zest that marks his every action. It is exhilarating to meet him and note the freshness of his personality. "He is great who is what he is from Nature and never reminds us of others," wrote Emerson. Dr. Coward fulfils that attribute of greatness for he is emphatically original, in mind as well as in manner. A keen lover of Nature, a follower of art—he has a room full of presentation pictures, by his own choice—a staunch friend and a tireless worker, Dr. Coward has made a success of his life, first by an implicit belief in himself, and next by dogged, unswerving purpose backed by an infinite capacity for work.

This is the man who has led the choral revival

which England has seen during the past fifteen years. Sir Henry J. Wood, speaking recently on the occasion of a presentation to Dr. Coward from the Sheffield Festival Association, said: "I should like to say what a deep debt of gratitude all us conductors and trainers and the whole musical world owe to Dr. Coward for the inspiration of his splendid enthusiasm, hard work and talent, displayed in the management and control of expression and diction as applied to large choral bodies." Such a tribute, coming from so eminent a conductor and choir-trainer, indicates, succinctly, the attitude of musical England towards Dr. Coward and his work.

On all hands is heard the same testimony to the labours of this gifted man. His fame is known everywhere in Great Britain, Germany and Canada, where chorus-singing is practised. The musical life of a generation has felt the influence of his work.

The story of his career, his early struggles, his subsequent triumphs, tells of difficulties conquered to which a man of weaker fibre would have succumbed. Such a record as that of Dr. Coward should be a stimulus to many a

struggling youth, feeling the impulse of achievement stirring within him, yet being "fast bound in misery and iron." Coward won through by sheer grit, fixity of purpose and a phenomenal application of systematic industry. These are the qualities which have brought him to the proud position he holds in the musical world to-day, these, and a whole-hearted application of the axiom, "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm."

CHAPTER II

LIFE STORY

HENRY COWARD was born in Liverpool on November 26, 1849. His father was a Sheffield working man—a grinder—with a bent towards music, for as soon as his apprenticeship with Thomas Turner and Co., cutlers, of Sheffield, was ended he yielded to his stronger inclination and became a professional banjoist and "nigger" minstrel. Mrs. Coward was a good singer, and toured and wandered with her husband for several years. They then took over the Shakespeare Hotel, Williamson Square, Liverpool, where, in due time, young Henry was born. Here the boy was nurtured in an atmosphere of music, of sorts. There was a "singing-room" attached to the hotel, and on special nights, the elder Coward, a clever executant on the banjo, was wont to perform. Blamphin the harpist, a celebrity in his day,

was a frequenter of the place and often played there. The adjacent theatre, the Star Music Hall and a dancing saloon furnished the receptive child with some curious early impressions, chiefly rhythmical. He speaks now of the exhilarating effect on his mind of the lilt of Lanner's and Strauss's waltzes to which he would listen, in all weathers, beneath the windows of those wonderful "palaces of pleasure." Like most children, he adored a band. One day he marched six miles, to keep within earshot of a regimental band doing route march. Then and there he determined to enlist, so that all day he might listen to the band playing! These trivial matters all go to show how the wax of this small boy's mind was receiving impressions to the influence of his later career. His environment was, however, abruptly changed on the death of his father. His mother removed to Sheffield when Henry was but eight years old. The child had not had six months' consecutive schooling when hard necessity drove him to help in the bread-winning for the family. At a time when, nowadays, most children are occupied with toys, games and elementary school tasks, this boy

HENRY COWARD, FATHER OF DR. HENRY COWARD
(Copied from a photograph on glass, taken, in 1856, in Liverpool)

was working to live. Indentures of apprenticeship with his uncle, a cutler in the employ of George Wostenholme and Sons, were signed. For twelve years he worked at the staple trade of Sheffield—twelve eventful years, as it proved, for in that time the seeds of musical ambition were sown, the awakening of his latent musical instinct was brought about, and that crowning asset of the self-made man, an implicit self-reliance, was evolved out of the hard schools of toil and poverty. Insensibly, his character was being "hardened" and "tempered"—to use a cutler's technicality. Young Coward learnt to think, and act for, and believe in himself.

He made up his mind to "get on" and determined that no obstacle should daunt him. His spelling was deficient. He taught himself by reading the placards and advertisements in the streets on his way to work. Walking was a waste of time unless he had a book to read or a score to pore over on the way. He thought shorthand might be useful to him; he acquired it by a laborious method. One day he stopped outside a large hoarding in a central street of the town. He learnt that the Duke of Norfolk was laying the foundation-stone of the new

Albert Hall. Coward climbed to investigate. A friend called out "Hey up, 'Arry, come down, there's a bobby." Coward came down—but *on the inside*, and saw the ceremony through. Thus he witnessed the genesis of the building where thirty years later he was to win his chief successes.

A chance remark of a fellow workman set the youth thinking. Sheffield workshops are unlovely places, grimy, dull, forbidding. The workers, to brighten them, pin coloured pictures on the walls. One of these, in boy Coward's "shop," showed a castle, as dismantled by Cromwell. "How was it that Cromwell could do all this?" he asked an old workman.

"He used 'is 'ead," the man replied; "it's them as uses their 'eads as gets on in the world." Coward pondered the words in his heart—"He used his head; why should I not use my head?" he meditated.

He used his head, literally. He took up the study of phrenology, mastering Fowler's "Handbook of Phrenology." His comrades "chaffed" him and named him "Bumpy." A few submitted to his examinations and were duly impressed by his sensational predictions.

The phase soon passed ; music was about to call to him, and the summons was not to be denied.

It was during these twelve years of boyhood and early manhood that he laid the foundation of that sturdy health which keeps him, in his sixty-second year, a young man still, spirited and energetic, youthful in body and mind. Early morning swims in Endcliffe Dam—now a park bathing-pool—were fine tonics for his day's labour at the bench. He was nearly drowned once ; a chance grab at his hair saved the future famous chorus-master for the fulfilling of his destiny. To these early habits of clean living and solicitude for the welfare of his physique Dr. Coward ascribes his present-day vigour. He boasts he has never had a headache in his life. At forty he took his first holiday !

During this formative period, the first stages of Coward's musical career were entered. A lodger at his home was a professional flautist and harp-player. He taught the boy the flute. His Sunday school teacher, Mr. John Peace, saw his musical aptitude and gave him violin lessons. He practised early and late, his studio

being the garret. A considerable portion of his pocket money went in the purchase of candles. As time went on, he found the difficulties of practical musicianship were so great that he determined to be a theorist. He never learnt the pianoforte or organ, a remarkable and probably unique fact in the case of a musician holding the degrees of Mus. Bac. and Mus. Doc. of Oxford University. His mind, then, being fixed upon a course of action, he sought a way for carrying it out. He heard of the announced formation of a Tonic Sol-fa class. To his bench-mate, Ben Burgon, he said "Come on, we'll join." This they did, and progressed so rapidly that the two youths were speedily selected as models for the rest of the class. (In later years, both became members of the Tonic Sol-fa Council, Coward being a Fellow of the College, and Burgon holding the Advanced Certificate.)

The class broke up. Tonic Sol-fa had but few adherents in those days. But Coward saw the utility of the letter-notation and was shrewd enough to foresee that here might be scope for the exercise of the gift for teaching that he felt he possessed. So he

joined another and more enterprising class, conducted by Mr. Samuel Hadfield, a name respected in Sheffield as that of a pioneer and devoted musical worker. The class was held at St. Stephen's School under the direction of the Rev. John Burbidge (later Canon of Liverpool), whose son, Mr. Noel W. Burbidge, is now one of the honorary secretaries of the Sheffield Musical Festival. Young Coward had a good alto voice and as he was a facile and sure reader from the Sol-fa notation, he soon was the mainstay of the alto section. During all these pursuits the youth was following music in other branches. Innumerable sixpences went into the pay-box of the local theatres when opera companies visited the town. He sang in his chapel choir and puzzled out harmony problems by analysis and intuition. One day his employer, Mr. George Wostenholme, met him and asked, "Well, my boy, what is your pleasure?" Swift came the reply, "Music's my pleasure, sir." "*Music;* you may as well go to the devil as learn music." Coward decided to risk it—and persevered.

He was now so proficient in Tonic Sol-fa that he was fired with evangelising zeal. He

had taken various certificates. A life-long friend and former pupil relates:

"The youth started teaching in the dungeon-like room underneath Queen Street Chapel. His method of teaching was of the lightning order, and there was always a considerable stock of dynamite on hand. The amount of modulator work we did was awful, and would have killed any one less enthusiastic than teacher and scholars were. The way we schah-lahed up and down that modulator, worked at time exercises, listened to mental effects, got pulled up in the middle of an exercise, and were da-capo-ed back to the start are memories that haunt one still. There was no mistake about the thoroughness of this drill. In a winter or two it told, and we were ambitious enough to give a concert. Locke's music to 'Macbeth' and Root's 'Pilgrim Fathers,' with certain selected songs, was the limit of our ambition. Looking back, I am amazed at the sublime cheek we had in those days. Most of us were 'prentice lads—Coward certainly was—and here we proposed running a concert, and to be its guarantors. Picture it, think of it! Our conductor was eighteen years

old, and the others, some were over, some under that age. The concert came off. We had a lovely prima-donna in pea-green silk, and a kindly contralto gave us her services."

Another concert was attempted by the adventurous band. They essayed Romberg's "Lay of the Bell." Their ambition o'erleapt itself and the fall cost them £25, which Coward scrupulously paid off when his apprenticeship was ended.

At twenty-two Coward weighed seriously his attainments and position. He felt that if the cry of his inner nature was to be satisfied he must substitute mental for physical work and live by his brains. His incessant reading, reinforced by trained habits of observation and assimilation of all that came to eye and ear, had given him a supply of that practical education which, by his lack of schooling, he had missed in boyhood. It was no light thing for him thus to sacrifice the substance for the shadow. He was one of the best working cutlers in Sheffield. Thanks largely to the training he had received in the workshop of Mr. W. H. Wragg, he had become so expert that his work won many prizes and was sent

out to exhibitions as samples of high-class handicraft. For the last knives he made he received the high price of £3 per dozen. He was never out of work one day, even in times of trade depression. But Coward wanted to be a teacher. An advertisement for a pupil teacher at Zion School, Attercliffe, Sheffield (salary £20 per year), turned the scale, and to change the metaphor, he took the plunge. He made a rapid calculation, in chalk, on his work bench and reckoned it was worth his while to endure a present loss for future gain.

He got the post and gave away his tools the next day, but, with true Yorkshire caution, on condition that he might have them if needed, within six months.

A period of almost incredible toil now began. When he left the workman's bench to serve for three years as a pupil teacher he could not decline a noun, or work a "sum" beyond long division. It may be realised, therefore, how much leeway there was to be made good. He set aside five hours a day for sleep, rising at five A.M. in summer and six in winter, to study before leaving for school. He won a science scholarship at South Kensington of which he

DR. HENRY COWARD AT THE AGE OF 21
(Photo by N. Holden, Sheffield)

did not avail himself. Other local certificates (Cambridge) were also taken, all being done in minimum time. He read voraciously. Only an abnormal brain and body could have stood the strain. He had been told, when a boy, that the equipoise of his mentality and his physical powers was so nicely balanced that he could never overwork himself; he might toil with his hands and mind to an unlimited extent. These early years of scholastic life proved the truth of the statements.

The Zion School was somewhat easy-going. The registers were marked once a week! Before a year was out the quondam pupil teacher was virtually headmaster. The inspector was impressed with the young assistant's powers and offered to recommend him to a better post. As he could not live on £20 a year and the authorities refused him the increase of £10 for which he applied, he obtained the headmastership of Tinsley National School at £80 a year, within twelve months of his leaving the workshop. This was quick work. But Coward's hustling methods were not completed. In four months he was installed at the Greasborough Congregational

School, at £120 a year, on condition that he took a teacher's certificate at the forthcoming examinations. This was done. Coward had accomplished the remarkable task of winning in twenty months a scholastic qualification which ordinarily occupied six or seven years.

The rest of his teaching career may now be rapidly dealt with. After three and a half years at Greasborough, he was appointed head of the Park Board School. By the irony of fate, he superseded his old chief of the Zion School. Four more years and a plum fell to his lot. This was the headship of the Free Writing School. There were but sixty scholars, no inspection, and a salary of £250 a year. The post was virtually a sinecure. No wonder that the Charity Commissioners, later on, deemed the school to be unnecessary. It was closed, its endowment being merged into that of the Grammar School, and the master, after ten years' enjoyment of its pleasant lines, receiving a solatium of £100. The loss of this post was a serious matter for Coward, now in his fortieth year. With characteristic daring, he decided to enter the musical profession.

We must now return to Coward's "twenties"

to pick up the threads of his musical pursuits. We shall, by that, be enabled to see how he fixed the foundation for that superstructure of fame which, in his middle age, has brought to him great honour and profit, and has so beneficially influenced his generation.

During his scholastic life, Coward worked unceasingly to spread the tenets of Tonic Sol-fa far and wide. He conducted classes at the Church Institute and Mechanics' Institute, Sheffield. Five nights in each week were devoted to this pioneer work. He was appointed conductor of the Sheffield Band of Hope Festivals, directing their annual demonstration of 3000 children at the Botanical Gardens: he also conducted the Whit Monday gatherings in Norfolk Park, controlling, on each occasion, from 10,000 to 20,000 singers. It may here be told that his experience in conducting huge masses of singers led to his being invited to direct the memorable gathering of children in Norfolk Park, on the occasion of the visit of Queen Victoria to Sheffield in her Diamond Jubilee year, 1897. The singing force numbered nearly 60,000 scholars and teachers; there were nine bands, distributed at various points over

the vast parterre of gaily clad children. By this device, the army of musicians, nearly a quarter of a mile in length, was controlled with surprising precision. The Conductor was presented to her Majesty, who was deeply impressed by the wondrously beautiful effect of so many thousands of sweet young voices.

In 1876 Coward and a few enthusiasts formed a choral body, the Sheffield Tonic Sol-fa Association, mainly with a view to doing propaganda work. How this small beginning—they once gave a concert with but ten tenors—developed into the splendid organisation now known as the Sheffield Musical Union, and often named "The Sheffield Choir," is told in a later chapter. Two years later he was appointed conductor of the Sheffield Amateur Instrumental Society. This body, at one time the only permanent full orchestra in the town, did good service in training young instrumentalists and performing good-class music at a time when Sheffield was, in orchestral matters, benighted. The conductor, on his part, derived benefit from the position, for he took up the study of orchestration which he

DR. COWARD CONDUCTING 60,000 CHILDREN AND TEACHERS IN NORFOLK PARK, SHEFFIELD, IN THE PRESENCE OF QUEEN VICTORIA, ON MAY 21, 1897

(Photo by Furniss, Sheffield)

turned to account when, later, he undertook the composition of cantatas and oratorios.

Events and his activities were gradually leading to the important third period of Dr. Coward's life. He had gradually equipped himself with the stock-in-trade of a professional musician. He had made a study of singing, scientific and artistic; his conducting and class-teaching formed a far-reaching connection and already he had begun to compose. This last attainment was exemplified in a cantata, "Magna Charta," and a number of songs, anthems, school-songs, glees, &c.

When, therefore, in 1887 the blow fell and he was deprived of his school post (as has been told), he determined to wring a living out of music. Being a non-executant, he saw that if he were to attain recognition he must have the guinea-stamp of a degree. He decided to go for "the best," the Oxford degrees of Bachelor and Doctor. Still unaided, studying harmony and counterpoint from text-book and by analysis, he slaved day and night. He had first to matriculate, and at that time the literary test required a pass in four subjects. He passed, and in eighteen months he had taken

his degree, the examiners being Sir Frederick Gore Ouseley, Sir John Stainer and Sir Hubert Parry. His exercise was a cantata, "The Story of Bethany." Five years later he obtained the degree of Doctor of Music with the oratorio exercise "The King's Error" produced the same year (1894) at the Tonic Sol-fa Festival, Crystal Palace.

By this time, 1894, through his many activities, Dr. Coward had become a personality in the City. To mark public appreciation of his educative work a town's subscription was organised and as a result the mayor presented him with the robes of an Oxford Doctor in Music.

We have now reached that period in Dr. Coward's career when the converging lines of his ambitions and dreams were closing into the centre of his fixed purpose—to become a great choral conductor. To relate how this came about we must be retrospective. The Tonic Sol-fa Association, already spoken of, had developed from its modest beginnings as a tuitional "class," into an important choral society. In its early days, the character of much of the vocal material was undeniably

poor. The new notation enabled all and sundry to read music at sight, and so a large number, lacking vocal endowment, entered its ranks. To this fact their conductor was rudely awakened one day. He pressed an outspoken musical friend to attend a rehearsal. The invited amateur critic went, and the choir were put through their paces. The theoretical side of it all was unimpeachable; the reading without flaw, the time, faultless. Eagerly the conductor awaited the verdict. "It is all very clever," said the critic, "but you can't sing." The conductor was aghast. It was mechanically perfect but the *music* was lacking. Expression, colour, interpretation, real musicianship were the missing qualities. Dr. Coward, ever ready to learn, thought it over and, like a wise man, accepted and profited by a friendly criticism. He revised his methods, and those of the choir. He determined they should "sing," and they worked again for many months. Gradually, the vocal qualification was made more stringent; the Tonic Sol-fa certificate, formerly necessary, was abolished and singers who could pass the voice and theory test in either notation were admitted. Several

times the society (the name had been changed to the Sheffield Musical Union) entered for competitions. They won the second prize at contests at the Crystal Palace and the Royal Albert Hall (Inventions Exhibition). At the Eisteddfod, at Carnarvon, they were not "placed."

Dr. Coward is fond of telling a story respecting the last-named competition.

The test piece was "He that shall endure," from "Elijah." The choir sang really very well; the popular impression was that they were far beyond their competitors. The judge, in his award, said their technical performance was the best, but that they had attempted to sing oratorio music "with expression." Dr. Coward had indulged in the process of "painting the lily and gilding refined gold." "Well," said the conductor, "if that is the case, no more competitions for me. In future, I'll go my own way." The Society never competed again. Years after, Dr. Coward returned to the scene—as chief adjudicator.

The Sheffield Festivals

Dr. Coward had thus, by the year 1895, reached the premier position in Sheffield as a choral trainer. About this time a few members of the St. Cecilia Choral Society (now disbanded) called a meeting to discuss the desirability of establishing a Musical Festival in Sheffield. The beginning of the affair was very modest, but to this initiative the foundation of the Festival is directly due. The scheme took the form of a trial performance of "Elijah," with a local orchestra and a chorus drawn from the various district and city musical societies. Dr. Coward conducted. The singing of the choir proved how superb and suitable for a festival was the available choral material. A representative meeting was summoned, with a view to organising a two days' festival for the following year, 1896, and an association for the promotion of musical festivals in Sheffield was formed. Sir (then Mr.) August Manns was appointed conductor and Dr. Coward chorus-master. The works selected were "Elijah," "The Golden Legend," "Job" (C. H. H. Parry) and "Faust" (Berlioz).

Dr. Coward realised that here was the opportunity of his life. He seized it with both hands. Disraeli's dictum that "The secret of success is constancy to purpose," fixed itself in his mind.

This man of dogged industry set himself to open a new chapter in the history of chorus-singing. He was helped by the musical conditions of Sheffield. The district is unusually rich in good voices, added to which there were many talented choir trainers and teachers who, in enthusiasm for the Festival, prepared and sent in the pick of their members and pupils. There is no need to dwell on the doings of that first Sheffield Festival. It was, chorally, a revelation. Only one London critic attended, the veteran Mr. Joseph Bennett. He wrote in the *Daily Telegraph* so glowing an appreciation of the wonderful chorus-singing at Sheffield that three years later, at the Festival of 1899, every important newspaper in the country was represented, as were several foreign journals, and the fame of Sheffield choralism became world-wide.

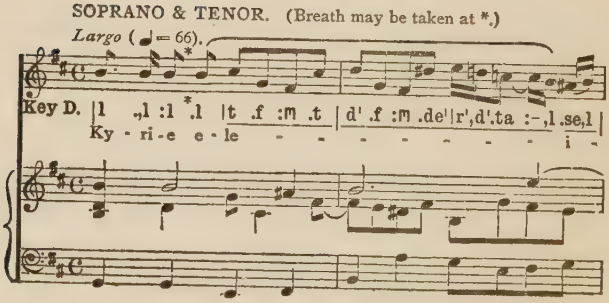
While on the subject of the Sheffield Festivals, with which Dr. Coward was for

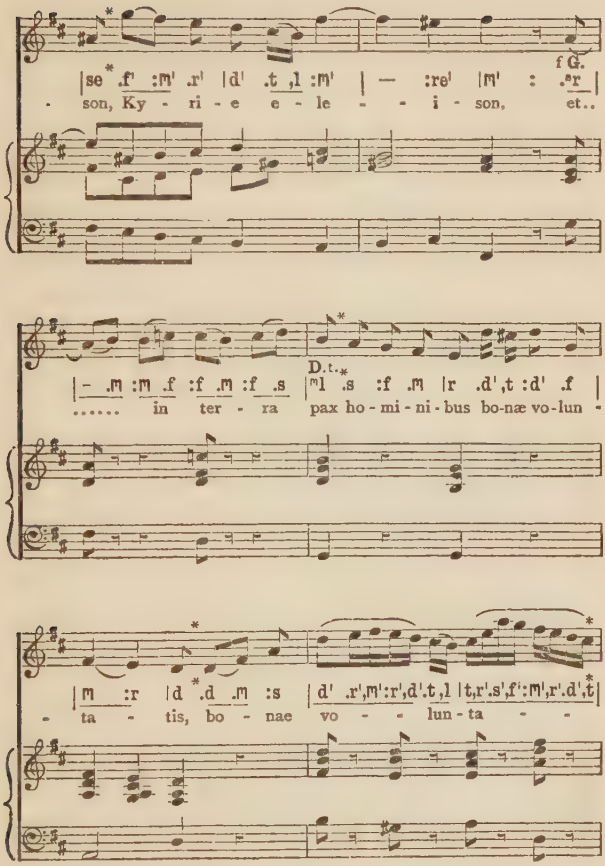
fourteen years so intimately associated and through the medium of which his fame was won, it will be convenient to complete the record of his work in that connection.

From the first, he laid especial emphasis on the importance of sight-reading in the choral tests. "I would rather have," he said, "a good reader with a medium voice than a medium reader with a good voice. The one sings everything with confidence and we get one hundred per cent. of what he or she can do; the other is uneven and often sings tentatively, especially in the difficult parts, where certainty is most essential." In this respect Dr. Coward differs from Sir Henry J. Wood, who puts the voice first, holding the view that, with fifty or sixty rehearsals, a medium reader, possessing a good quality and power of voice, provided the ear be good, can learn everything, while the musical effect of the better voice is greater. It may here be said that the latter opinion was endorsed by the Festival Chorus Committee who, in the more recent Sheffield Festivals, considerably altered the relative number of marks given under the heads of Voice and Sight-reading.

The rules for the selection of the chorus were practically the same at all the Festivals (save in the matter of marks, just named). Every applicant was tested by a Committee of eight or nine local professional singing teachers, Dr. Coward being one, who were seated behind a screen, to secure absolute impartiality. The tests were three in number—Voice (quality, compass and power), Sight-reading in Tune, Sight-reading in Time. The following examples will show the exacting character of the tests:

Voice Test

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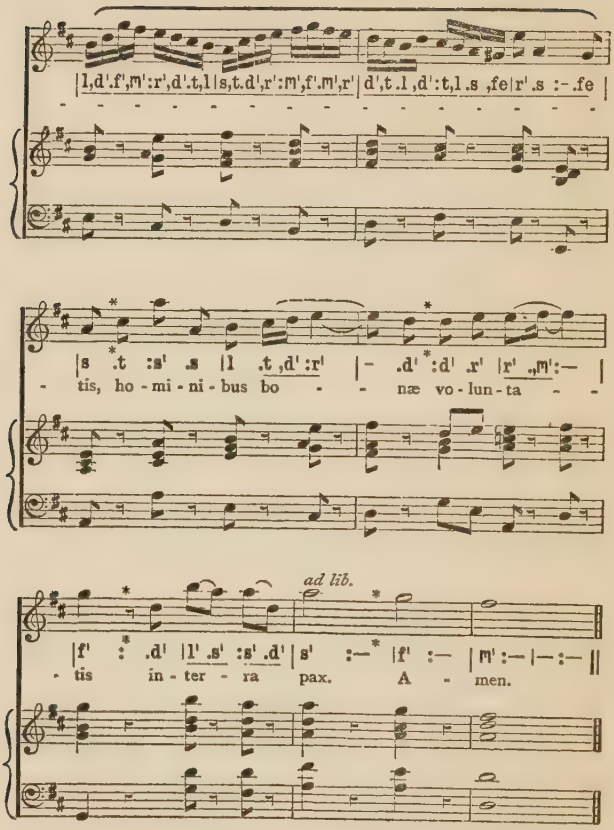
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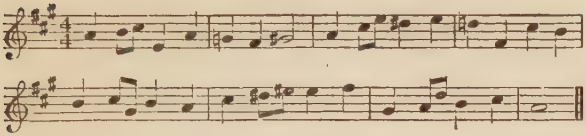
- tis in - ter - ra pax. A - men.

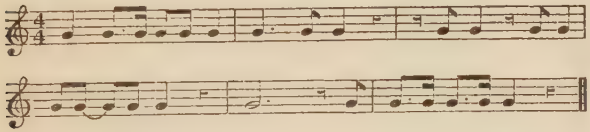
SIGHT TEST (TUNE) unaccompanied



The tests may be sung from either notation to the solfa syllables or to any vowel sound.

SIGHT TEST (TIME) unaccompanied

The Time Test will consist of 5 bars in common time and will include no difficulties beyond those included in the following specimen:



The sight tests were specially written by Dr. McNaught and sent in sealed envelopes, opened only in the examination room, so that the trial was perfectly bona fide. Election was by marks. Three hundred and fifty applicants obtaining the highest total marks were accepted; the rest were declined, no favour being shown or exceptions considered. After every Festival the choir was disbanded. The chorus was entirely voluntary. An allowance

for expenses was made—25*s.* to ladies, and 20*s.* to gentlemen. There were special regulations as to uniformity of dress and all members were expected to attend seventy-five per cent. of the rehearsals or lose their places in the choir.

The singing of the choir at the 1899 Festival sent the name of Dr. Coward ringing through the country. An interview and biography in *The Musical Times* from the pen of the late Mr. F. G. Edwards served to familiarise the musical world with the personality of the now famous choir-trainer. He and the choir had received high eulogy from Sir Hubert Parry and Sir Edward Elgar, who had at the Festival conducted respectively "King Saul" and "King Olaf." A veteran critic remarked: "I have not returned to hear the second part of 'The Messiah' for fifteen years, but I went back yesterday to hear that choir, and stayed to the last bar." The Festival was completely successful. There was a handsome profit and the choir had leaped to a proud position alongside those of Birmingham and Leeds. The credit of this choral success was, without doubt, entirely due to the chorus-master.

Though Sir August Manns had directed a few practices previous to the final full rehearsals, he did nothing in the way of training, simply accepting Dr. Coward's work as it stood. When, therefore, Sir August Manns declined the invitation of the Committee to conduct the 1902 Festival on the grounds of failing health, it was thought by many that Dr. Coward would obtain the reversion of the post. What his own personal views or expectations were it is impossible to say, but there is little doubt that it has been the great disappointment of his life that he has not had the honour of directing a Sheffield Festival. The Committee, while deeply appreciative of Dr. Coward's services and his phenomenal ability as a chorus-master, felt it to be desirable that a musician of world-wide reputation in the department of orchestral and choral conducting should be appointed, one whose name as chief would lend prestige to the Festival. Mr. Henry J. Wood, who obviously fulfilled all these requirements, was engaged, with Dr. Coward in his former position,

Dr. Coward accepted the situation, and set to work in his own phrase to "achieve the

impossible." There were to be present at the forthcoming Festival several prominent composers, conducting their own works, among them Sir Edward Elgar ("Dream of Gerontius"), Dr. Cowen ("Ode to the Passions"), Mr. Coleridge-Taylor ("Meg Blane"), Sir Hubert Parry ("Blest Pair of Sirens"), and to these the chorus-master felt he was directly responsible. (In the case of the other works, Mr. Wood took some part in their preparation, attending a number of rehearsals in Sheffield for that purpose.) These compositions were subjected to a laborious and minute preparation. In the case of "The Dream of Gerontius," there was an additional incentive to excel. The work had been produced at Birmingham Festival two years previously in a performance so indifferent on its choral side as seriously to retard the acceptance of the work in England.

It is here opportune to correct a misapprehension with regard to English appreciation of Elgar's master-work. It has often been stated, and the new edition of "Grove" endorses the error, that it was due to the performance of "The Dream of Gerontius" at the Niederrheinische Fest at Düsseldorf in

May 1902, and Herr Richard Strauss's warm compliments to the composer, that "the attention of English managers was again turned to it" (Grove's Dictionary, vol. i. p. 729). In view of this statement, and others of a similar character, it is well to remember that more than four months before the German performance the oratorio was decided upon for the Sheffield Festival of 1902, while even prior to the Sheffield choice, it was selected for performance at the Worcester Festival, also held in 1902. The reproach that Elgar's great work was ignored by English musicians until Germany realised its beauty does not apply to the Committees of two English Festivals.

Dr. Coward noted the failure of an historic festival choir to realise the opportunities and greatness of "The Dream of Gerontius." One of his amiable weaknesses, and one that has been a factor in his success, is the desire to excel. To borrow his own phrase, he likes "to go one better." Birmingham failed, Sheffield must succeed. Sheffield did succeed. The composer at last heard his conception realised. He had attended a choral rehearsal prior to the Festival and was amazed at the finish and colour

of the singing. In connection with the singing of the Demons' chorus, which, under the trainer's teaching, had become a hard snarling, unmusical orgy of "despairing, cursing rage," the composer said to the chorus: "You are just right; you cannot overdo that expression." The remark is often quoted in justification of Dr. Coward's interpretation of those vivid pages, when critics, as occasionally they do, charge Dr. Coward with exaggeration and the sacrifice of artistic proportion for the sake of point-making and obvious "effect."

Sir Hubert Parry, ever an admirer of the Sheffield musician, Dr. Cowen, and Mr. Coleridge-Taylor expressed their delight at the singing of the chorus, and their testimony, carried afar, helped to spread the still growing fame of Sheffield's chorus and its master. During the afore-mentioned Festival performances, Dr. Coward haunted the auditorium like a "perturbed spirit." His anxiety that all should go well, together with his temperamental restlessness and unbounded energy, made it impossible that he could retain his seat, like an ordinary member of the audience. He had told the chorus that he should keep his eye on

them, and it is said of the earlier Festivals that most of the singers looked at him, in the audience, more than at the conductor! Be that as it may, he provided himself with a camp-stool, and throughout the performances he could be seen tip-toeing about from stalls to saloon, from balcony to gallery, frowning, smiling, with nods and facial expression, following the text in lip-language and generally playing the part of an admonishing or approving, watchful mentor. What, in any other man, might have been condemned as fussiness and a desire for publicity, was tolerated as being due, and no doubt rightly so, to his whole-hearted interest in the choir and a desire that they should do themselves and him full justice. These considerations banished all his self-consciousness; he was never one to consider much what people thought of him or his eccentricities.

Two other matters connected with the 1902 Festival yet remain to be mentioned. One is that the Selection Committee, perhaps as some sort of a solatium to Dr. Coward for the withholding from him of the conductorship of the Festival, invited him to compose a cantata as one of the commissioned novelties. He

accepted the offer and on October 1, 1902, he had the distinction of conducting his cantata, "Gareth and Linet," at the Sheffield Festival with Madame Ella Russell, Miss Muriel Foster, Mr. Ben Davies and Mr. David Bispham in the solo parts. The music of the cantata is referred to in a subsequent chapter.

The other circumstance was an invitation extended to the Sheffield Festival chorus, at the suggestion of Sir Edward Elgar, to sing in the "Coronation Ode," composed by him for the projected gala performance at Covent Garden Opera House, in connection with the Coronation of King Edward VII. 150 members of the choir were selected and Dr. Coward was entrusted with their training. The Coronation was to take place on Friday, June 27, the gala performance on the following Monday. As all the world knows, the King was stricken with illness, and on the previous Tuesday came the announcement of the postponement of the event. Apart from the anxiety and grief at the cause of this calamity, it was a bitter disappointment to the choir, who were thus robbed of a proud and historic distinction. The affair was not however without its amusing sequel. A monthly

journal came out with an elaborate criticism of the gala concert, signed by "A Peer's Daughter." The singing of the Sheffield Festival chorus and among others, of Signor Caruso, was adversely criticised—"seldom have we heard a worse chorus" said the writer—the whole couched in language of a flowing and imaginative character, calculated, as Sir W. S. Gilbert says in "The Mikado," "to give vraisemblance to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative." Alas, for the unfortunate lady critic, the performance never came off. Great was the amusement of the choir when the secretary read out to them an account of how badly they had sung at the postponed performance! The article subsequently formed the basis of a libel action on the part of one of the parties concerned, and the enterprising editor had to pay £200 for his "previousness."

Mr. Henry J. Wood was unable to accept the post of conductor of the 1905 Sheffield Festival. Again the name of Dr. Coward was mentioned, informally, but the committee, taking the same stand as before, offered the position to Mr. Felix Weingartner. Dr. Coward had already been associated with the famous Vienna

conductor. In April 1904, the Musical Union, Dr. Coward's Society, fulfilled an engagement to sing in "The Dream of Gerontius" and other works at a festival, organised by Professor Kruse at Queen's Hall, at which Mr. Weingartner conducted. That event served to forge between the two musicians a link of mutual regard and confidence which made the dual control of the 1905 Festival smooth and successful.

I had the pleasure of accompanying Dr. Coward, in the summer of 1905, on a visit to Mr. Weingartner at Bad-Kreuth, in Bavaria, and there was made aware of the full confidence which the conductor placed in the judgment and resourcefulness of his chorus-master. Mr. Weingartner was anxious that Dr. Coward should conduct some of the shorter works, offering readily to surrender the baton in those cases to his subordinate. The suggestion, however, was never acted upon, for the committee had already definitely arranged that at the Sheffield Festivals there should be no conducting guests or deputies. They were paying very handsomely for the services of their distinguished conductor; his presence was a valuable asset at each concert and they (I think

wisely) resolved that the responsibility should be vested in the one chief, and in him alone.

Mr. Weingartner acted on the same principle with regard to the chorus as did Sir August Manns, that is to say, he took over the work of Dr. Coward, making but few, and those only trifling, alterations. He never saw the chorus until a fortnight before the Festival, when half a dozen consecutive choral rehearsals were held in Sheffield. The delight of the eminent composer-conductor was boundless. He smiled, patted the trainer on the back and at one point, after a brilliant performance of the students' and soldiers' chorus in Berlioz's "Faust," to the infinite amusement of the chorus, he seized the beaming chorus-master and gave him a resounding kiss.

The Sheffield Festival Chorus and their chorus-master had the honour of performing before King Edward VII. and Queen Alexandra at the opening of Sheffield University in June 1905. They sang the National Anthem, "Daughter of Ancient Kings," from Elgar's "Coronation Ode," and "O Gladsome Light," from Sullivan's "The Golden Legend." In connection with the last-named piece a curious

contretemps occurred. There was no orchestra or military band in the Great Quadrangle where the Royal party, some thousands of guests and the chorus were assembled, the nearest musical instruments being the Royal Trumpeters in the street outside. Under these circumstances Dr. Coward undertook to sing the key-chord for the choir. But, in the buzz and rustle of the upstanding crowd, the tonality was not obtained by the singers. The conductor raised his baton and signed for a start. There was a momentary consternation and then some brave spirits, making a wild guess—not possessing the endowment of absolute pitch—started, but in A flat indeed of F! There was no help for it, they must go through with the performance; it would never do to have a breakdown. They pluckily sang on, in a foreign key, three semitones too high, the sopranos pealing out their repeated high B flats with the bravery of true heroines. Despite this hitch, the singing of the chorus was much admired and Dr. Coward received, on behalf of his force, many cordial compliments.

For the Festival of 1908 Mr. Henry J. Wood was reappointed, with Dr. Coward still in his

old position. By this time, as will shortly be told, Dr. Coward's numerous training and conducting appointments in various parts of the country made it extremely difficult for him to retain and carry through his duties of choir-trainer to the Sheffield Festival. The strain of night journeys from Glasgow, Newcastle and other places where he now held remunerative regular appointments, made it imperative that he should jettison some of his most taxing work. With infinite regret, after the 1908 Festival had been successfully carried through, he tendered his resignation. This was reluctantly accepted by the Committee and so ended the happy and invariably friendly associations which for fourteen years had existed between Dr. Coward and the Sheffield Festival Committee. Steps were at once taken to offer to him, in some tangible way, a proof of the regard and gratitude of the Committee. A testimonial fund was opened, to which there was a ready and generous response. The presentation, which consisted of four fine water-colour paintings by Frank Saltfleet, Austin Winterbottom, J. McAdam and Alwyn Holland, the selection of Dr. Coward himself, was made on

January 13, 1911, by Colonel Hughes, C.M.G., Treasurer of the Festival, acting for the Duke of Norfolk, who at the last moment was unable to attend. There was a representative gathering of Sheffield musical people presided over by Mr. T. Walter Hall, Chairman of the Committee and a distinguished amateur musician. Among the many tributes to Dr. Coward's powers and position none would be more valued than the generous words spoken by Sir Henry J. Wood, quoted in the opening pages of this volume. Very significant, too, were the words of Mr. E. Willoughby Firth, one of the honorary secretaries of the Association, whose work in the cause of the Festival has had much to do with its success.*

* The occasion recalled another memorable presentation to the same recipient when, in June 1903, at the Town Hall, Sheffield, in the presence of five hundred guests, Lady Mary Howard presented the Festival Chorus-master with a life-size portrait of himself in his degree robes, painted by Mr. James Moore, together with a group of bound scores, an album and a silver tea-urn for Mrs. Coward, the whole being a gift from the members of the Sheffield Musical Union.

TROPHIES FROM A TOUR IN GERMANY. DR. COWARD AND HIS WREATHS
(Photo by Sir W. C. Leng & Co., Sheffield)

Fame and Rewards

During the twelve years with which I have been dealing, events marched rapidly, as much in the professional as in the artistic development of Henry Coward.

The various stages need not be detailed here. The salient events of the period and a summary of his multifarious activities will suffice to show how rapidly the fame of the gifted chorus-master spread afar. Pliny's precept that opportunities lost can never be regained was always kept in mind. Dr. Coward had sown untiringly; now the reaping of fortune and fame seemed near at hand and, good business man that he always was, he meant that it should be harvested.

Mention has been made of his labours on behalf of amateur orchestral music in Sheffield. In 1899 the Sheffield Professional Orchestra was formed with Dr. Coward as conductor. At first the constitution was on a co-operative basis—no profits, no fees. The programmes were well planned; a symphony or a concerto, sometimes both, at each concert. But the venture languished through lack of public

support, and finally, after three seasons, the concerts were discontinued. The organisation continued to exist, however, and for several years furnished the orchestra for the concerts of the Sheffield Musical Union.

Dr. Coward became in increasing request as a teacher, lecturer, examiner and adjudicator. In the latter capacity he has figured at the National Welsh Eisteddfod, the competition festivals of Morecambe, Blackpool, Southport —in fact at most of the meetings of that type in all parts of the country. He was for many years Examiner for the Matriculation Certificate of the Tonic Sol-fa College, Examiner in Practical Music for the Froebel Society, music-master at the Sheffield Training College (200 students), Lecturer in Music at Sheffield University, singing master at King Edward VII. School and at the Girls' High School, Sheffield. He has edited two hymnals for the Primitive Methodist denomination, to which he contributed many tunes.

Dr. Coward has a facile pen and a keenly discriminative observation. These, for fifteen years, he used as musical critic of the *Sheffield Independent*. Later, he became a contributor

over the signature "Diapason," to the *Sheffield Weekly News.*

When the Sheffield Festivals were established he wrote a series of weekly articles in the same paper signed "Tremolo." These were mysterious and very amusing productions, purporting to be written by a lady member of the chorus. The assumed "she" chatted glibly about the music, the millinery of the singers, the antics of "the dear Doctor," the doings of Mr. Wood, the merits and charms of "Cyril" to whom "she" was engaged, and a score of other topics, touched upon with a bewildering feminine inconsistency and with artful little lapses of grammar and spelling. For a long time the secret was well kept and not one of the Festival chorus suspected that "Tremolo" was none other than Dr. Coward himself!

By his acceptance of various appointments in Scotland and the North of England to act as choral conductor of old established and famous musical societies, Dr. Coward has, within the last decade, made himself one of the chief musical personalities in the country. The first important citadel of choralism to fall to his all conquering baton (in 1901) was the Hudders-

field Festival Choral Society, an historic body, which, it may be noted, gave in London, in 1907, a very fine performance of Bach's Mass in B minor at Queen's Hall, under Dr. Richter. The appointment to be chief of the Leeds Choral Union followed in 1905. The Leeds singers, too, have sung in London on several occasions and are rivals, in popularity, of the Sheffield Choir. A year later the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Society secured his services and in 1908 the Glasgow Choral Union appointed the Sheffield musician to train and conduct the society's choral concerts. In addition to these permanent posts Dr. Coward was made chorus-master and co-conductor, with Mr. Wassili Safonoff, of the resuscitated Newcastle Festival (1909) and he undertook a similar joint position at the Southport Festival in the same year. He also directed a festival held at Aberdeen in 1910. For three seasons Dr. Coward conducted the Preston Choral Society and for a longer period the Barnsley St. Cecilia Society (resigned in 1908).

CHAPTER III

COMPOSITIONS

Dr. Coward's compositions are all choral. They range from small Sunday school hymns and songs, of which he has composed a large number, to an oratorio and a festival cantata. In the larger forms he has written a sacred cantata "The Story of Bethany" (exercise for the degree of Mus. Bac. 1891); "Victoria and Her Reign" (cantata for ladies' voices and orchestra); "The King's Error," oratorio (exercise for the degree of Mus. Doc., Crystal Palace Tonic Sol-fa Festival 1894); "Heroes of Faith" (Sheffield 1895); "Tubal Cain," choral ballad for chorus and orchestra (Sheffield Musical Union, 1899); "Gareth and Linet," dramatic cantata (Sheffield Festival, 1902) and "The Fairy Mirror" (for ladies' voices with tableaux vivants), in addition to the early cantata "Magna Charta" already mentioned.

It must frankly be said that the versatility of

this many-sided man does not successfully encompass the composition of extended works. In a small form—a part-song, a glee (for example, his merry little piece "A Stitch in Time"), an anthem ("Lord, Thou art good," from "The Story of Bethany" is especially effective) or a hymn tune (his setting of "Jesu, high and holy" in leaflet form has reached a sale of over a million copies)—his flow of ideas and his resources in handling them are equal to all requirements. But his fount of musical invention is soon exhausted; the trivial and the obvious are then drawn upon and the music speedily becomes mechanical and merely pedantic. He has a thorough knowledge of academic device. "The King's Error" and "Gareth and Linet" fulfil all the obligations of the text-books. What they lack is true, innate musical qualities, imagination, and the original thinking which can set aside a formula and utter an idea with freshness and point. The rough reception accorded by the critics to "Gareth and Linet" at the Sheffield Festival of 1902 must have persuaded Dr. Coward that he was unwise in further pursuing the thorny path of a composer, for since then he has written nothing of any importance.

DR. COWARD SKIPPING ON THE S.S. "GRAMPIAN" EN ROUTE FOR CANADA. 1908
(Photo by Furniss, Sheffield)

CHAPTER IV

DR. COWARD AND CHORAL TECHNIQUE

Manner and Methods

Any one meeting Dr. Coward for the first time, without any foreknowledge of his personality, would find it difficult to credit that this blunt, tearaway personage, with the bluff, hearty speech and unadorned manner, could be the famous musical force whose genius for choir-training has stamped itself directly and indirectly upon the singing of a nation. He is, on first acquaintance, as unlike the born leader of vast masses of artistic people as could be imagined. But on closer knowledge, the force of his personality begins to assert itself. He has an opinionative, dogmatic manner, acquired through a triumvirate of despotic occupations —those of schoolmaster, musical critic, and

conductor. He is, by nature, autocratic. This is one of the secrets of his success. A man of finer manners might hesitate to, in fact could not, ride rough-shod over the sensibilities and susceptibilities of many refined persons with whom he is brought into contact, as does, on occasion, Dr Coward. He will stop a rehearsal to remonstrate with a departing member of a chorus, or sarcastically to inquire of a tardy arrival if his train was very late, the while the eyes of three hundred people are fixed upon the confused victim. If a lady is seen talking, he does not hesitate to address her by name, and suggest that the absence of incorrigible talkers at rehearsal is more appreciated than their presence. If in conversation, or in argument, or in a public or committee discussion he has an objection or a contradiction to make, there is no "kid-glove manner" in the uplifting of his voice; he abhors a euphemism; to him a spade is a spade and his "No," his "Yes," "I will" or "I will not," are emphatic and final. This is not to say that he is, by nature, either cantankerous or boorish. He is one of the kindliest and most warm-hearted men in the world.

With children he is especially charming, and in play, on the golf-links, or on tour with family or friends, he is a sexagenarian Mark Tapley, adaptable, cheerful and polite. It is only in music that he is the man of blood and iron. There is more bark than bite in his ferocity, but it generally has the desired effect. His will becomes dominant; character tells. Occasionally, at rehearsal, he lashes himself into a frenzy of passion (real or simulated); he sneers at, storms and abuses his half-terrified, half-amused forces, but none dare utter a word of protest or justification. The air is too electric; Dr. Coward would explode, if crossed when he is in that highly charged condition. But he never loses his head and is discreet enough to know when to stop, or turn his blows into caresses and substitute the *suaviter* for the *fortiter in modo.*

Dr. Coward is seen at his best when appearing before a strange chorus for the first time. The newness of his method, together with the eccentricity of his mannerisms, occasions mingled wonder and amusement. Especially was this so when he took over his duties with the choirs at Glasgow, Newcastle, and Leeds

(Choral Union). In each case his predecessor had been a quiet man, musical and artistic, but somewhat conventional. The coming of Dr. Coward was like that of an eagle in a dove-cote. He fluttered the Volscians in Corioli with a vengeance!

The energy of the man is amazing. Audiences realise but a tithe of it when they see his conducting, vigorous as it is. They should see him at rehearsal. He has been known to break three stout batons in a night. On one occasion when rehearsing the Sheffield Festival Chorus in Berlioz's "Faust," he wanted to get the chorus to realise the varying personality of the types of people concerned in the choral music—peasants, drunken soldiers, rollicking students, devout villagers (in the Easter Hymn) and, finally, the lost souls in Pandemonium, snarling out their unholy gibberish. Dr. Coward, to emphasise the point, proceeded to enact a sample of each character. The fidelity of his impersonations, especially the bucolic vacuity of the peasants, trolling out their droned "fifths," and the bibulous tones of the revellers in Auerbach's Cellar, set the chorus in a roar and made one realise that Dr. Coward, who

has probably never been inside a theatre in his life, save to hear an opera, is a born actor.

He has neither "heart" nor "nerves." At the Newcastle Festival of 1909 he happened to be standing in the entrance hall of the hotel where he was staying. A new arrival, a friend, was asking for a porter to take his bag upstairs, the while complaining that, in an hotel of that size, there was no lift. Dr. Coward darted forward and without more ado, gripped the heavy bag, and before the astonished visitor, who was little more than half his age, could protest, he was well on his way to the third floor. During a visit to the Austrian Tyrol, he and I indulged in a little modest mountain-climbing, and though the energetic Doctor can give me nearly twenty years' start in age he proved a very lively pace-maker and was ready to take the floor at the dances organised in the hotel in the evening.

His mentality is as alert as is his physique. So busy a man has little time for reading, and none for modern fiction. As a mental pick-me-up he reads daily the literary extracts in the "Realms of Gold" column in the *Daily News*. His knowledge of history, the classics,

and matters of art, outside music, is, without being profound, sufficiently general to enable his conversation and his talks to his choirs to be spiced with apt allusion and interesting turns of phrase and similes. He is a halting speaker. His ideas flow more rapidly than his utterance can deal with. The sentences tumble over each other, while the threads of his argument go astray, and half of them are never recovered. Digression is his strong point. For one sentence which reaches the haven of a full stop, two break off inconclusively at a dash, and a third is merely a string of exclamations. But behind it all there is design, if one has but the patience to let his "style" run its course. "I used to think Dr. Coward wasted a lot of time at rehearsal in pointless talking," remarked a member of the 1902 Sheffield Chorus to the writer, "but now I see there is a plan in it; there is method in his madness."

While on the subject of Dr. Coward's mental keenness, an incident may be related which not only serves to prove to what an extent he has cultivated the habit of memorising, but also it throws an instructive side-light on his know-

ledge of human nature, and indicates how much of his success is due to his realisation of the aphorism that the proper study of mankind is man.

It was while in Innsbruck, in the autumn of 1905, that Dr. Coward learnt that he had been appointed to the coveted and important post of conductor of the Leeds Choral Union. To celebrate the occasion, he invited a small party of travelling companions to dine with him at an open-air café. From time to time he was seen to take a paper from his pocket, glance at it for a few moments, return it and then join in the conversation. At last one of his friends asked what he was doing—if it was the multiplication table he was studying.

"No," replied Dr. Coward, "it is a list of the names of the chief officials and committees of the Leeds Choral Union (some forty in number). I am memorising it so that when I get back and am introduced to various people there, I shall know something of them and their position in the Society. People like to think they are already known, if only by name." In jest, some one offered to hear his lesson and he agreed. In that short time he had thoroughly

memorised all the names and initials of his future colleagues.

From the foregoing some idea may be gathered of the characteristics and personality of this purposeful man. There are other and more intimate facets of his character which can only be touched upon here. He has had a large family to whom he has given, at the cost of much self-sacrifice in earlier years, the benefits of that first-class education denied to himself. His eldest son, Henry, is B.A. (Honours) London, B.A. (Honours) Cambridge, B.A. (Honours) Sheffield Universities. He was a choral scholar at King's College, Cambridge. The second son, Charles Ernest, was mathematical scholar, prizeman and 18th Wrangler, Cambridge (Caius College), and afterwards passed the exacting examination for the Indian Civil Service. He is now engaged in musical work in London, conducting choral and orchestral societies. The third son is Bachelor of Engineering at Sheffield University. The second daughter, Eleanor, took eight medals at the Royal Academy of Music, London, was elected A.R.A.M. and is a widely known teacher of singing.

Dr. Coward's faith is deeply rooted, and whatever his fatigue, however arduous his week's work, involving an average of some fifteen hundred miles' travelling every seven days, he is almost invariably to be found, on Sunday mornings, in his place at Queen Street Congregational Church, where he has worshipped and served for upwards of forty years. He is a non-smoker and a life-long abstainer.

In the winter season his activities are far-reaching and onerous. His regular engagements consist of the following rehearsals:

	Average Attendance
Monday, Leeds Choral Union	300
Tuesday, Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union	330
Wednesday, Glasgow Choral Union	300
Thursday, Sheffield Musical Union	300
Friday, Huddersfield Choral Society	275

In addition to the above there are occasional rehearsals to be directed such as Morecambe Festival Choir (300), Aberdeen Festival (300), Southport Festival Choir (180). Every week there are two hundred students at the Sheffield

Training College to be taught, and when such tours as those to Germany, Canada, and round the world are in course of preparation, or any important concert in London is to be organised and rehearsed they take up the busy conductor's Saturdays. These take the form of what he calls "picnics." The members assemble at 2.30, rehearse for two hours, there is a break for tea and rest of one hour, and then they continue for another two hours.

It is at such a time when the conditions are congenial and the aim some sort of "conquest," be it of a continent or a rival choir, that Dr. Coward's method is seen in full working order. Let us take as a model one of these four-hours rehearsals for the 1911 World Tour and see what is the marvellous secret which can mould a large body of people into one vast artistic unit, moved by a common emotion and applying to its expression all the resources of a highly developed technique, and—here is the wonder of it—doing it all in the same way. But first we must examine the constitution of this special choir. The material is splendid. Every applicant for one of the two hundred

DR. COWARD DIRECTING A REHEARSAL ON DECK ON THE S.S. "GRAMPIAN," EN ROUTE FOR CANADA, 1908
(Photo by Furniss, Sheffield.)

places in the choir was tested by Dr. Coward, and as two out of every three were rejected it will be realised how large was the field of choice. Though named the Sheffield Choir it is made up of contingents from Dr. Coward's choruses in Sheffield, Leeds, Huddersfield, Bradford, Newcastle, Southport, and London. One member comes from Newport (Mon.), another from Shropshire, and four from London. Attendance at the weekly rehearsal costs some of the members £2 in railway fare and hotel expenses. From this some idea may be gathered as to the eagerness of singers to gain a place in the chorus, and the splendid spirit animating the entire body.

Dr. Coward's first care, when the choir was finally chosen, was to issue to each member a booklet giving a list of the works to be studied, the poems, in full, of the part songs (all to be memorised) and the following characteristic "address," which, in itself, explains much of Dr. Coward's "method" and shows how he organises the enthusiasm as well as the musical attainments of his singers.

"METHOD IS THE SECRET OF SUCCESS

"To achieve the goal of our endeavours—perfection of performance of *each* of the above pieces—we must take the motto:

"METHOD IS THE SECRET OF SUCCESS

as a good working axiom.

"In this relation there are several instructions to be followed, which, for a less important event might be considered not necessary.

"1. It is advisable to underline in red ink the particular part you will have to sing.

"2. Please number, in red ink, neatly and clearly, every bar or every third bar of every piece, as I shall issue instructions, later, stating how every bar of every piece is to be marked and sung. This will save immense time in rehearsal and lead to unity in performance.

"3. Make special efforts to memorise the words. The most neglected part of a piece is the words. The part I lay most stress upon being perfect is—the words. To assist you in getting these perfect in articulation, pronunciation, and characteristic diction, I have had the words of every piece printed in this

booklet, so that, being available in handy form, they can be looked over at odd moments in armchair, motor, train or tram.

"METHOD IS THE SECRET OF SUCCESS

"4. Practise reading aloud at least two pages of the part-song words daily. One page should be read *mf* and the next page *pp* with smart lip and tongue action.

"A PLEA FOR CONSTANT RECAPITULATION

"To memorise words or music, frequent repetition is necessary. Instrumentalists who astonish us by their memory-playing, learn their pieces by the frequent repetition necessary to overcome the technical difficulties. Let us take similar care, and we shall have no difficulty in memorising all the programme.

"HINTS ON PRIVATE PRACTICE

"1. Practise each piece as though you had never seen it before. Even in pieces like the 'Messiah' and 'Elijah,' sing every bar with care until it is absolutely correct. By this means incorrect phrasing, semi-tones sung for full tones in the 'Messiah,' runs and divisions, wrong chromatics, and many hoary errors and

stereotyped mistakes will be banished from our performances.

"METHOD IS THE SECRET OF SUCCESS

"2. I would urge each singer to study the pieces seriatim. We are all inclined to give more attention to pieces we like than to those we rather dislike; but as uniform excellence is demanded, please take the pieces in rotation.

"3. Practise the most difficult phrases of each piece much more than the easier portions. Put a circle round each difficult part and 'grind' at it till it is mastered. This is important, because a choir gets its character from the way it surmounts difficulties. If a choir sings ninety-nine per cent. of a piece well, and stumbles over the one per cent.—however difficult the phrase may be—it suffers in prestige. Therefore take care of the difficult phrases; the easy parts can take care of themselves.

"METHOD IS THE SECRET OF SUCCESS

"4. Practise five minutes each day some difficult or *pp* phrases with SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MAINTAINING THE PITCH. Nothing 'gives

a choir away' more than flattening. Therefore the determination and habit of mind to keep the pitch should be cultivated. As far as possible I have avoided accepting any singer who either sang flat or showed a tendency to lose the pitch (flatten). I trust that you, by giving attention to this important point, will prove that my selection of yourself has, in this respect, been justified.

"REHEARSALS AND REGISTRATION

"FULL, SECTIONAL, AND PRIVATE

"It goes without saying that every available rehearsal should be attended, due notice of which will be given.

"As we shall give over a hundred concerts (fancy, over a hundred times of thrill and delight !), to ask you to average one rehearsal per concert, will not be an extravagant demand. Please see that this be done either in Full or Sectional Rehearsals. These latter will be arranged for privately, and called by the Local Convener.

"That every member may receive *full credit for all good work done*, you will find at the end

of this booklet a Diary in which you are requested to note day by day the full time you have devoted to the private study of the music or words of the works, as well as in Rehearsals (Full and Sectional). At each Full Rehearsal I hope to have the pleasure of noting your daily entries.

"NECESSITY OF A HIGH IDEAL

"Some of the above requirements may seem too exacting, but we have to remember that we have the choral honour and dignity of the Motherland in our keeping. We must, therefore, have an exalted ideal, and must work with enthusiasm to attain to it. In addition to the above considerations, there are two very important reasons why I most strongly urge—nay, almost command—persistent work from the present moment to the 24th of March.

"The first of these is: THE VOICE PRESERVATION ASPECT WHICH CALLS FOR OUR MOST SERIOUS THOUGHT.

"By having both the words and music thoroughly mastered, you will be able to PLACE YOUR VOICE PROPERLY for each word and sound,

and thus avoid vocal strain. This will enable you to keep your voices in form all through the Tour, as in Canada. Those who lack this power must expect voice failure.

"The second reason is: THE PLEASURE PRESERVATION ASPECT.

"I am anxious that nothing preventable shall interfere with our pleasure and freedom from anxiety while on the Tour; but the sense of inefficient preparation of any piece would be such an incubus to the whole party that I appeal to all to accept cheerfully the drudgery of PERSISTENT PRACTICE to secure PROSPECTIVE PLEASURE, or in other words:

"Take present pain
For future gain.

"However, I have such confidence in the choir as a whole, that I feel I am voicing your sentiments when I say that, if there be any individual member who does not regard the unique character of the Tour as calling for exceptional and determined efforts to achieve perfection, it is advisable for that member to resign at once, as none of us want any cold, half-hearted singers in our ranks.

"With warmest greetings to all my colleagues in the enterprise,

"Believe me,

"Yours very truly,

"H. COWARD."

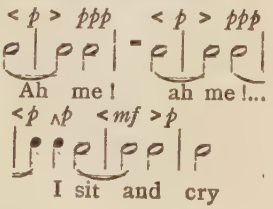
Such is the spirit in which the Conductor approaches his work. The response is loyal, for the rehearsals show but one or two absentees, and the amount of work carried through is phenomenal. Dr. Coward says he does not allow more than three rehearsals for the most exacting work. Not a moment is lost. Every bar being numbered, reference to any place is instantaneous. The ladies are hatless; every eye must see the beat. There is no talking; conversation in the ranks is condemned as much by the singers as by the conductor. A great saving of time at rehearsal is effected by the issue to every member of the choir of a schedule of minute instructions, as to the minutiæ of expression which are to be reviewed at the forthcoming rehearsal.

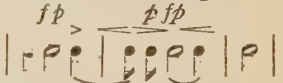
The following examples, taken from a schedule of instructions, will serve to show to what an acme of finish the choir is trained in a myriad points of detail and finish.

Please enter on your copies, very plainly, the instructions relating to your own part, which are given below. Disregard the instructions to the other parts.

NOTES ON INTERPRETATION OF "FIRE, FIRE MY HEART" (MORLEY)

Bar.	Beat.	Voice.	
1		All	Firm sustained forte. Cancel pressure mark >
2	2	2nd S.	Strike firmly.
	3	All	*ff* quick *molto dim* to *piano*.
	4	1st S.	*ff* firm attack.
3	1	1st S.	*fp*
3	3	2nd S. C. T. B.	*fp* on minim.
4			Same as bar 3.
5 and 6			Sing as marked in copy.
7	2 to 4	B.	Prominent in 4 beats, other parts *p*
8	2 to 4	2nd S.	Prominent in 4 beats, other parts *p*
9 and 10	4	2nd S.	Syncopated note *fp*; pressure to be put on each quaver.
11	1	1st S.	Sing E♭ very firmly.
12 to 24		All	Sing real pianissimo but preserve same relative variations of pressure on notes.
24 to 27		All	Sing as marked in copy.
28 to 33		2nd S.	Real *pianissimo* in 2nd soprano.
28 to 33		1st S.	1st soprano as follows:



Bar.	Beat.	Voice.	
34	2 to 4	C.	Four notes well marked then *p*
35	2 to 4	1st S.	Four notes well marked then *p* (Then call for help) v v v *fp*
36 and 37		T.	Prominent < >
37 and 38	4	B.	Four notes prominent.
38 to 43	4	2nd S.	Leading voice. Sing chiefly against musical accent as follows: *f p fp* and call for help, a-las! *fp* *p fp*  but none comes nigh me!
43	2	T. B.	In each part sing the first note of the point of imitation *ff* with full broad vowel at the word "Fa" (pronounce "Fah") then quickly shade off to piano, saying all the "las" very lightly at the tip of the tongue. This will allow the point of imitation to be heard distinctly in each part.
	4	C.	
44	2	1st S.	
45 to 49	3	2nd S.	
50	4	1st S.	All these "Cs" must be struck spasmodically with very quick release to *mp* (= *ff*, *mp* or *ff p*).
51	2	C.	
51	4	2nd S.	
52	2	T.	
52	4	1st S.	
53	1	B.	
53	4	T.	

Bar.	Beat.	Voice.	
54 to 56		All	Dim to *p* in all parts.
57 to end		All	Repetition of above instructions, only last phrase must be sung as *f* as possible with a good tone

"THE LADY ORIANA" (WILBYE)

This *madrigal* is unusually difficult to interpret on account of the close imitations, which to get clearly defined require great vocal control and agility, but if the following directions be carefully marked and followed the great charms of this delightful and clever *madrigal* will be unfolded to the listener.

The music consists of contrasted phrases, of points of imitation, being followed by plain chordal passages.

Bar.	Beat.	Voice.	
1 and 2		C.	C'alto theme to be prominent, soprano *p*, tending to *pp*.
3	3	2n d T.	Theme prominent *f*.
4 and 5	2	1st T.	*Piano, semi staccato.*
4, 5, 6	4	1st S.	*f p fp cres.* — *p* The La-dy
6, 7, 8	1	B.	Theme *f*, all other parts *p*.
9 and 10		All	Plain smooth singing as marked in copy.
11 and 12		All	The word "all" in every part to be struck *f* and then rapid *dim* to *p* at words "in the."
13 to 15		All	Plain chording as in copy.
16 and 17		All	As bars 11–12.

Bar.	Beat.	Voice.	
18 to 22		All	Plain, as in copy.
22	2	T.	*f* > *p* Other voices *piano*.
23	2	1st S.	*f*—*p* *f* — *p*
23	4	2nd S.	A thou-sand, thousand
24 to 33		All	Plain chording as in copy; mind contrasts in *p* and *f*.
34 to 37		2nd S.	Melody prominent, other voices subordinate.
38 and 39		C.	Melody for six notes prominent, then *p*.
39	3	1st S.	Take up theme prominently for six notes. The high 2nd soprano must be sung *pp*.
38 to 40		T. B.	To be subordinate to the ladies' voices.
41 to 44		All	Let each voice give accent on the syllables "vir," "ed," "crown." The 1st and 2nd sopranos will have some difficulty in doing this until they have studied it carefully.
45		All	Let each part sing the first two notes loudly to the syllables "which," "Ce," then *dim* to *p* on succeeding syllables "re," "mony ended." By doing this in every part the imitations will be made clear.

Bar.	Beat.	Voice.	
54 to 62		All	Plain chording to be sung as in copy.
63 to end		All	Give extra accent on the word "live" whenever it occurs in any voice. Sing the quavers (half beats) forcibly. Say every word clearly. Take ample breath and finish as loudly as possible *ff* or *fff*.

SPECIAL NOTE

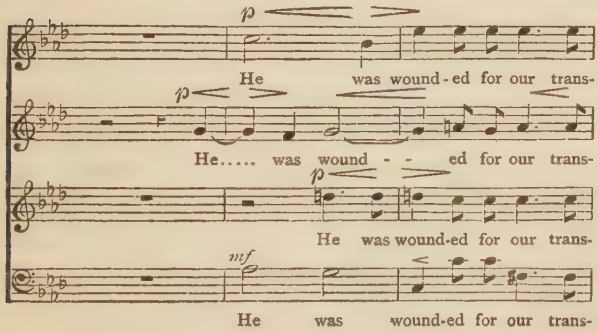
You will notice that in the madrigals, the same instruction is repeated time after time, so that if you learn to do a certain thing once (for instance, the striking of a note *f* and the sudden decrease to *p*) you should be able to apply the principle to all similar phrases. In a way, it is a trick, but to do it (the trick) well, you must practise it assiduously until you can do it sub-consciously. Practise each example separately. You will then get into the way of doing it spontaneously, which is the end in view.

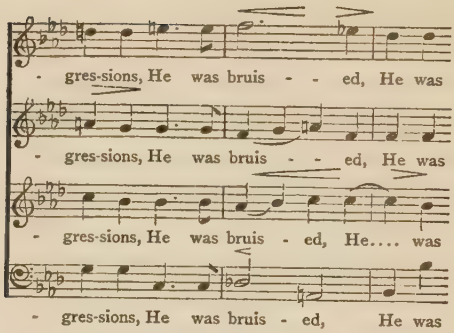
His material ready to hand then, the notes learnt, the words in most cases memorised, the famous trainer now proceeds to "Cowardise" the music. First he rehearses the discipline of the baton; how, that at a given signal, a particular effect shall be forthcoming. If he signs

for a *pp*, a pianissimo there must be, or he will know the reason why. He has perfected a kind of "floating tone," an ethereal, blended, ambient sound which, the outcome of the strictest selection and self-subordination on the part of every unit in the choir, yields one of the most enchanting forms of musical pleasure that it is possible to conceive. If a clock cannot be heard ticking through a chord of this tone, sung by three hundred voices, the conductor fines them down until the test is passed. "If your neighbour can hear you it is too loud," he cries. All in the choir know the sign for this toneless pianissimo, and woe betide the unthinking one who exceeds his or her due proportion. Another choral effect, for which he frequently calls, is a sudden withdrawal of breath pressure on a note bearing an accent. He does not allow the singers to accent, as it were, the whole value of the note, but only the initial attack; by this means the accent is vignetted and given infinitely more significance. In this little detail of virtuosity the choir is very expert. He realises that correct vowel definition and unity of mouth cavity positions are essential for the securing of a perfect

blend. By insisting on this requisite and by constant "pattern" with his singing voice, he shapes the collective tone until each part is unified, and the blend comes to the ear like the four parts of a highly-trained string quartet. The dynamic nuances of which he is so fond—and which he indulges in a little too freely sometimes when repose would be preferable—are measured to a fraction of a beat; the pressure and taking off of the breath must be done to exact plan, or the ensemble suffers. A quotation will illustrate the point.

From the chorus "Surely, He Hath Borne" (Messiah)
(Voice parts only)





CONDUCTOR'S NOTE.—The sustained notes which end in prepared discords must be increased for five quavers, then *molto dim.* to *p*.

In the preparation of what a pianist would call "part-playing"—the prominence or reticence of a particular part or phrase—Dr. Coward speaks constantly of what he calls the Law of Sympathy. It is a well-known fact in refined chorus-singing, that singers sub-consciously adapt themselves to their tonal environment. That is to say, if, in a pianissimo passage, one voice is unduly loud, the adjacent singers unconsciously increase their tone; conversely, a weak voice or part has more than an individual minus result upon the aggregate tone. Dr. Coward warns his chorus against

such influences. He asks on the other hand for the sympathy and self-abnegation of the singers in harmonic, fugal or imitative passages, in order that due prominence may be obtained by part or parts for the yielding of a special effect. A good example of this may be cited in the closing bars of the chorus "Behold, God the Lord," in "Elijah." The monotoned phrase, "Onward came the Lord," is made prominent in the alto and tenor parts, the while the whispering sopranos and basses carry on a flowing, undisturbed legato passage.

One of the vital elements in Dr. Coward's system is the arrangement of his crises. It is in this matter that his masterly generalship is best exemplified. He never shoots his bolt too soon. His choir piles Pelion upon Ossa, as in the Amen chorus in the "Messiah," but the master-climax is always held in reserve until the moment when it can be superimposed with overwhelming effect. To quote from the "Messiah" once more, the most brilliant thing the chorus do, in their unique performance of that work, is the chorus "His Yoke is Easy." Technically it is a *tour de force* with a thrilling climax where the sopranos, after a bar and a

half of repeated high F's, without snatching a breath, suddenly flash up to B flat, as if in triumphant exultation.

Rhythm is another matter of vital import in Dr. Coward's system. The feeling of rhythm must not be obscured, particularly in soft sustained passages where the danger is greatest. Such an instance is to be found at the end of the Mystic Chorus in Elgar's "The Kingdom." Here the conductor is very severe on his forces if they sing "a pointless, rhythmless piano."

There are two other branches of choir-singing wherein Dr. Coward has materially advanced the art. These are in the respects of diction and tone-colour.

In the matter of enunciation, he tells his choir that if the audience have to refer to their books of words, there is something wrong. Crisp articulation is studied from the first. Oral gymnastics are practised and dental, labial and compound consonants are exaggerated. He makes the singers read (not sing) the words aloud, emphasising every consonant and separating those in juxtaposition. When oral clearness has been obtained, the proper

placing of the consonants is studied and emphasised, and their correct value determined and apportioned. This solicitude for the marking of every consonant led to a curious effect at the Newcastle Festival of 1909. The choir (trained by Dr. Coward) was banked up on the stage of the Palace Theatre, a place quite unsuited to festival music, owing to its dry and aggressive resonance. In Professor Bantock's "Omar Khayyam," the consonants were so clean-cut and emphasised that they came across the auditorium with a rattle like volleys of miniature rifle-shots, quite distracting the attention from, and indeed, marring the effect of the music in certain passages. In a proper concert hall, the vocal tone, amplified by a suitable resonance, would have put the consonants into correct focus and the effect would have been excellent.

Finally, the crowning glory of Dr. Coward's method lies in his power to make his singers realise the dramatic and emotional import of the music they sing. It is in this respect that the magnetism of his personality, that "personal equation" to which he so frequently alludes, becomes operative. His temperament is so

warm, his imagination so vivid that he sees through the possibilities of a phrase, a page, a chorus or a complete work, and can extract every ounce of what it will yield in the way of interpretation. One may not always agree with his readings. He has been strongly assailed on various points. But none can doubt the force and thoroughness of what he does. There is always a picture.

Dr. Coward relies, in this matter, on two principal media, which may be classified under the heads of Declamation and Psychology. In the former class are comprised the infinite colour tints and emotional suggestiveness which a trained singer can derive from the proper emphasis and oratorical treatment of words and sentences. Just as a good actor or orator can enhance the point of spoken words by a hundred little devices of stress, lingering, a fractional silence before a salient word, the niceties of punctuation, proportionate emphasis and, chiefly, a timbre of tone reflecting the emotional meaning of word or phrase, so is it possible for a choir to be trained to exercise all the subtleties of good elocution (save in the respects of inflection and speed, which, in

music, are fixed quantities) to the illumination of the text and the vitalising of the music. Dr. Coward has realised the infinite potentialities contained in the fact just stated, and it is because he has applied it so thoroughly in the preparation of his choirs, that they sing with such intelligence and dramatic veracity. The opening words in the chorus, "Surely, He hath borne our griefs," from the "Messiah," derive a greatly enhanced significance from the choir being taught to dwell upon the consonant sound, which, indeed, is heard *before* the beat, and is followed by a quick withdrawal of breath pressure. In Elgar's "Go, Song of Mine," the broadened vowel-sound and exaggerated aspirate in the word "hardness" induce a quality of tone fitting to the word, while later, "grief" is sung with a deepened resonance and timbre, together with a lingering treatment of the consonants, imparting a semblance of "tears in the voice." A thousand instances might be quoted further to illustrate the point, but those named will serve to show how great a part verbal suggestion plays in the singing of Dr. Coward's choirs.

The words "mood" and "atmosphere" are

so frequently used in speaking or writing of music, that they are, to some extent, discredited. Yet no others will serve exactly to describe the most potent quality of the best choral singing. Dr. Coward holds the view that the derisive chorus, "He trusted in God," in the "Messiah" should be sung with derision, not in the same tones as are used for the poignant "Behold the Lamb of God," or the celestial "Glory to God." He believes, and carries out his theory, that when the Soul of Gerontius says to the Angel, when approaching the "fierce hubbub" of the Demons, "How sour and how uncouth a dissonance," that the following demonic chorus must be sung in a sour and uncouth manner. In dramatic music, he characterises, by means of style and tone-colour, the personality of the enactors or narrators; as for examples the drunken revellers in Auerbach's cellar in "Faust," trolling out their blasphemous mock "Amens," the bright-toned students singing their college song; or, in "Gerontius," the moving pathos of the Souls in Purgatory, singing "Lord, Thou hast been our refuge," the pure exaltation of the hymn "Praise to the Holiest"; or, in Professor

Bantock's "Omar Khayyam," the dark, fateful mystery of the line "The Me within Thee blind."

A conductor must have some marvellous grasp of the psychology of a collective body of artistic people, when he can so work upon the unified brain of the chorus as to make them yield these strange and moving effects. For it is not only in the obvious tricks of choral virtuosity, possessed by every prize-winning conductor, that Dr. Coward excels—though he can on occasion play to the gallery and engineer an *ad captandum* effect.

He can tap the deeper sources of expression latent in a mass of singers, and make them surrender finely wrought, largely conceived, and long-sustained emotional phases of mind which, by means of choral art, are transmitted to the audience, thereby enhancing immeasurably the veracity and appeal of the music.

No account of Dr. Coward is complete without reference to his mannerisms. At rehearsal he is impulsive, eccentric, full of strange oaths (in a Pickwickian sense) and wise aphorisms, merry, thunderous, coaxing, discursive, anecdotal—all in turn, but he is never dull. He

has an inexhaustible store of epithets and adjectives, and will bully or wheedle a choir as the mood fits him, or as seems likeliest to secure his wishes. "You miserable tenors," he will call out, "afraid of a top G." "You sing it as if you were all club-footed," he tells the basses. "Don't talk to that lady; if she's not marked her copy, don't remind her; leave her to her conscience." "I told you to mark it *forte*," he shouts in a rage, to a timid-voiced soprano. "It is marked *forte*," she ventures to say. "Well then, why don't you fort?" he retorts, amid laughter. "You are singing this madrigal as if it were a Buddhist praying machine," he tells them, "singing is not like churning." "Hello! here is the recurring decimal again," he remarks, as an habitual late-comer makes her way to her seat. Once, after a particularly tame and faulty performance of a "Messiah" chorus, he paused for a moment, and then announced, "There will be a silver collection," referring to the local custom of performing Handel's oratorio in chapels where no charge is made for admission. A volume might be filled with the jokes and reproaches, the sallies and epigrams of the

tireless conductor. Sufficient, however, has been told of the man and his method to furnish some idea as to how he has brought the art of choral-training well-nigh to perfection. Through all, he retains the affection of his workers. When rehearsal is over, he is among the chorus, chatting and answering questions, with abrupt and yet cheery good-nature. One of his singers broke into poetry, in lines which are worth quoting for their ingenious play upon the Conductor's name. They may fittingly close this personal chapter on "The Pioneer Chorus-master."

TO DOCTOR COWARD

Coward! and yet like Romeo the lover,
"'Tis but thy name that is thine enemy."
Not in thee 'tis to fight from under cover
Or shrink, all-vanquished, from unequal fray.

Thy martial spirit ne'er is overpowered,
Thy perseverance, courage never lacks;
And 'neath the leadership of gallant "Coward,"
We "scale" the heights and quicken our "attacks."

Yet 'tis no Marshal's Baton that thou wieldest,
And which doth hold thy forces in command;
At St. Cecilia's ancient shrine thou yieldest
Sweet fruits of song, grown ripe beneath thy wand.

CHAPTER V

"THE SHEFFIELD CHOIR"
(Sheffield Musical Union)

In a biography of Dr. Henry Coward it is essential, for completeness, that some particulars be furnished of the wonderful choral organisation now known as The Sheffield Choir, a body with which Dr. Coward's wide fame and his chief life-work are indissolubly united. But, first, the position must be made clear as to the exact identification of "The Sheffield Choir." Dr. Coward's "Sheffield Choir" is not the Sheffield Festival Chorus, which he has never conducted out of Sheffield. The assumption, a few years ago, by the Sheffield Musical Union (which is the official title of Dr. Coward's choral society), of the name "The Famous Sheffield Choir," was resented in Sheffield as being likely to convey the impression that the Sheffield Festival Chorus was referred to by

A LADIES' SECTIONAL REHEARSAL FOR THE ROUND THE WORLD CHORAL TOUR, 1911, IN DR. COWARD'S DRAWING-ROOM
(Photo by Furniss, Sheffield)

that name. It was, the objectors said, the Festival Chorus which first carried afar the fame of Sheffield. *That* was "The Famous Sheffield Chorus." Besides, urged others, there are other eminent and older choral societies in the city. The Amateur Musical Society, of which Sir Henry J. Wood is conductor, is "a famous Sheffield Choir."

There may, at that time, have been some ground for this complaint, especially as regards the Festival Choir, for which the Musical Union was, it is certain, frequently mistaken, both by critics and audiences. But time has gradually righted the matter. There has been no disposition on the part of the Musical Union to borrow a reflected glory from the Festival Chorus. The officials scrupulously advertise the correct title of the society. The Musical Union, being Dr. Coward's own choral preserve, contributed for one Festival nearly fifty per cent. of the total membership. As time went on, and the various choral duties of the Musical Union singers became more taxing—foreign tours, London and Sheffield concerts, &c.—their representation in the triennial Festival chorus became proportionately less, but they

still have a proud percentage of members in that select and highly organised body. If, then, the personnel of the Musical Union may not be so strictly censored or so representative of a wide field of selection as is the Festival choir, which, being tested throughout anew every three years, is triennially fresh, there are counterbalancing advantages which, if they do not entirely serve to equalise the two organisations, go far towards doing so. The Unionists are in constant practice under the same conductor, and on the same vocal method ; their numerous tours and out of town engagements have necessitated the preparation of a large repertory of works, these sometimes having to be learnt in a very brief period, and by frequent appearances they have cultivated choral endurance and a collective concert habit which prevents such factors as "nerves," fatigue, staleness and other detriments creeping into their singing.

To return, however, to their claim to the title of "The Sheffield Choir," they may be allowed to have established it by a process of what the law calls "Prescription." As the following history of their doings shows, they have sung in

different parts of England, in Germany twice, and in Canada, and have done infinite credit to their conductor, themselves and their native city. A better title might have been "Dr. Coward's Choir," but as "The Sheffield Choir" they elect to be known, and so long as their individuality is thoroughly understood, and they continue to sing as magnificently as they have done in the past, no one can grudge them their chosen title.

In the earlier chapters of this volume, some reference has been made to the inception of this fine choir. The following brief history will supply the salient features of their honourable record.

Established in 1876, with Dr. Coward as trainer and conductor, the society aimed, from its very modest beginning as the Tonic Sol-fa Association, at giving attention to the teaching of sight-reading. Attached to the society were elementary and advanced singing and theory classes. These, it may be remarked in passing, formed a training-ground for many local choirmasters.

Steady progress was made, Dr. Coward insisting from the first upon those qualities of

diction, dramatic expression, absolute precision, and unity of vowel definition which, through the years, have come to full fruition in the singing of the choir as we hear it to-day.

In 1892, the society, having in the meantime changed its name to that of the Sheffield Musical Union, there began a series of concerts of more importance than those hitherto given. The first was the performance of Sir Hubert (then Dr.) Parry's "Judith," conducted by the composer. This was a great success, quickening the activities of the Union and further increasing local interest in choral music.

In 1895 the Union played an important part in the inception of the Sheffield Festival, by means of the trial performance of "Elijah" (already referred to in the Chapter on the Sheffield Festivals).

In 1899, Mr. W. S. Skelton and Mr. A. S. Burrows were appointed chairman of council and secretary respectively.

These appointments soon had a beneficial effect on the policy of the society, which is as well managed on its business as on its artistic side. A visit to Wentworth Woodhouse, on

the invitation of Earl Fitzwilliam, to sing in an important choral concert also took place in 1899.

In 1901, the first of a series of annual performances of "The Messiah" was given. These have become famous throughout the North of England. Dr. Coward has specialised in "The Messiah." Choir-masters and singers attend these annual revivals to learn how, by means of close study and attention to details of expression, the familiar strains can be invested with new interest. The society makes a handsome profit on these annual concerts, which, thereby, serve a material as well as an artistic purpose.

1902 saw the first of those choral excursions, now regarded as being the special "line" of the society. Leeds, the stronghold of Northern chorus-singing, was visited, with the object of letting the neighbours and friendly rivals hear Dr. Coward's forces in a programme of alla capella pieces. The demonstration was so successful that an invitation to return to give a performance of "The Messiah" speedily followed. A further honour was paid the society, in 1902, by the Handel Festival

authorities (Crystal Palace) inviting one hundred and thirty singers to be sent, to take part in the great national event. The contingent was the largest ever sent by a single provincial society. Since then, every three years, the Union has supplied one hundred and fifty or more members to sing at the Handel Festival. It was while singing at the Handel Festival of 1909 that news came to the choir of the tragically sudden death of Mr. J. H. Lawson, the Treasurer of the society, who, with Mrs. Lawson, had a large share in building up the prosperity of the Union.

1904 saw the Musical Union make its first appearance at the Queen's Hall. As has already been indicated, Professor Kruse organised a London Musical Festival and engaged the Sheffield body to sing—a mark of signal honour. Mr. Weingartner was the conductor. The works performed were Elgar's "The Dream of Gerontius," Beethoven's Choral Symphony and Beethoven's Mass in D. The singing of the Sheffield organisation was a revelation to the London audiences. Critics and conductor heaped appreciation on the choir and its chief, and from this point we may date the wide-

reaching fame of the chorus. At a banquet given by Professor Kruse to Mr. Weingartner, Dr. Coward and a number of musical guests at the close of the Festival, Mr. Weingartner, in proposing a toast said: "England has, so far, beaten Germany in choral singing, and we shall have to send our German conductors to Sheffield to be taught how to train choruses."

Since that memorable event, the Union has sung many times in London, taking part in various works under conductors of widely different methods. The singers have, thereby, acquired a valuable habit of mobility and sensitive alertness; they are wonderfully plastic and receptive to the impress of temperament.

Among the conductors under whose direction they have sung at various times may be named Dr. Richter, Sir Henry J. Wood, Sir Hubert Parry, Professor Bantock, Sir A. C. Mackenzie, Mr. Arthur Nikisch, Mr. Weingartner, Sir Edward Elgar, Dr. Cowen, Dr. Harriss, Mr. Coleridge-Taylor, Dr. Vogt, Dr. Ham and Mr. Alec Maclean.

1906 found the Musical Union carrying their choral campaign to foreign shores. In conjunction with a contingent from the Leeds

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Choral Union, a Yorkshire Chorus was organised, to visit the Rhine Provinces. Concerts were given at Düsseldorf, Cologne and Frankfort, under the direction of Dr. Coward, and in conjunction with local orchestras. "The Messiah" and "The Dream of Gerontius" were the principal works performed. The tour was more than successful; it was a triumphant progress. The municipalities of the cities visited offered lavish hospitality to the invaders from Yorkshire, and the general verdict of the German critics was to acclaim the choir as one of the finest musical organisations in the world. There can be no mistake about the sensation and enthusiasm which their singing created.

In the same year, the Sheffield Society had the distinction of singing in the presence of Her Majesty Queen Alexandra, who attended a concert given by the London Symphony Orchestra in which the Sheffield singers were taking part.

1907 held two interesting experiences for the much-travelled choralists. They sang before Sir Wilfred Laurier, the Canadian Premier, at a concert at Queen's Hall, and they visited

Birmingham, to sing in "Elijah" in the Town Hall—the very home of Mendelssohn's popular work.

1908 was a memorable year in the history of the society. The colossal scheme of taking two hundred singers to give a series of sixteen concerts in eleven days in Canada, was conceived by Dr. C. A. E. Harriss, and organised and carried out by the Union. It was at first thought to be impracticable, but, Dr. Harriss, Dr. Coward and the Committee, by foresight and determination, conquered all obstacles. The places visited were Montreal, Quebec, Toronto, Ottawa, Buffalo, Niagara, St. Catherine's, Hamilton, Brantford, London, Lindsay and Peterborough. The only full day of recreation was spent in the neighbourhood of Niagara Falls. The choir just traversed the frontier between Canada and the United States, on the occasion of their visit to Buffalo. The tour, despite some trying experiences, inseparable from an enterprise of that magnitude, was enjoyed by the members, who endured rigours of climate and fatigues of travel for the sake of the services to the cause of choral music which such a tour was calculated to render.

During the tour, the choir and conductor were the recipients of many cordial tokens of welcome. There were receptions at Montreal by Sir Montagu and Lady Allen, by Sir George and Lady Drummond and by Mayor Payette and the Corporation. At Ottawa the Mayor and Corporation entertained the chorus and officials to luncheon, and the Governor-General, Earl Grey, and Lady Grey held a reception at Government House. The Mayor and Corporation of Toronto and the Toronto Clef Club paid the visitors a similar compliment, while at Niagara, Buffalo and St. Catherine's there were further hospitalities.

In July 1910, the Union had the pleasant experience of singing in "The Dream of Gerontius" at Arundel Castle, on the invitation of the Duke and Duchess of Norfolk. Sir Henry J. Wood conducted. The Duke of Norfolk's close connection with Sheffield, and his assistance in the musical affairs of the city (he is President of the Festival), served to add interest to a significant event.

Later in the same year, a second visit to Germany organised by Mr. W. L. Lindlar of Sheffield was undertaken and proved almost

as successful as the first. Owing to the greater distance travelled in so short a time the endurance of the singers was severely taxed, but their loyalty never wavered. The singing was again on a high plane of excellence, and once more, lavish hospitality and cordial receptions were bestowed upon the visitors. The towns visited were Aachen, Düsseldorf, Essen, Leipsig, and Dresden.

The latest and, so far, the most far-reaching venture of the Sheffield musicians, is the Round the World (British Dominions) Tour organised for the summer of 1911, from March until September. Dr. C. A. E. Harriss, who has been concerned in the organisation of colossal musical tours during the last ten years, is the moving spirit of the project. The vast and complicated machinery necessary for the organisation of nearly a hundred concerts in all parts of the world, the transport, housing and control of a party of two hundred and twenty, and the pre-arrangement of receptions, banquets, sight-seeing, &c. on a six months' tour is under his hands. Among the places to be visited are Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Indianopolis, St. Paul,

Winnipeg, Vancouver, Victoria (B.C.), Honolulu, Brisbane, Sydney, Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, Durban, Johannesburg, Pretoria, Bloemfontein, Kimberley and Cape Town.

The choral repertory comprises a hundred compositions, ranging from the great oratorios of Bach, Handel and Mendelssohn to a varied selection of madrigals and part-songs.

LIST OF CHORAL WORKS CONDUCTED OR PREPARED BY DR. COWARD

Athalie. Mendelssohn
Angels of the Bells. Foster
The Apostles. Elgar
The Annunciation. MacLean
Alexander's Feast. Handel
Acis and Galatea. Handel
Alto Rhapsody. Brahms
Blessed Damozel. Debussy
Blessed Damozel. Bainton
Bavarian Highlands Suite. Elgar
Blest Pair of Sirens. Parry
Ballad of the 'Clampherdown.' Bridge
Banner of St. George. Elgar
The Beatitudes. Franck
Blessing, Glory. Bach
Christ in the Wilderness. Bantock
Coronation Ode. Elgar
Creation. Haydn
Choral Symphony. Beethoven
Coronation Mass. Harriss
Chandos Anthems. Handel
Choral Fantasia. Beethoven
The Challenge. Holloway

Dream of Gerontius. Elgar
Dettingen Te Deum. Handel
Dream of Jubal. Mackenzie
Daughter of Jairus. Stainer
Elijah. Mendelssohn
Everyman. Walford Davies
Erl-King's Daughter. Gade
Eve of Christmas. Rimsky-Korsakoff
Festgesang. Mendelssohn
Festival Te Deum. Sullivan
Choral Folk-songs. Boughton
Faust. Berlioz
Flying Dutchman. Wagner
Flag of England. Bridge
Fly, Envious Time. Gatty
Frithjof. Bruch
Go, Song of Mine. Elgar
Golden Legend. Sullivan
Glory, Honour, Praise. Mozart
Gesang der Parzen. Brahms
God's Time is Best. Bach
Gareth and Linet. Coward
Hero and Leander. Lloyd
Hero and Leander. Mancinelli.
Hiawatha. Coleridge-Taylor
Hymn of Praise. Mendelssohn
Honour, Glory. Bach
The House of Dreams. Weingartner
Heroes of Faith. Coward
Holy City. Gaul
The Hours. Roeckel
Israel in Egypt. Handel
The Invincible Armada. Boughton

Intimations of Immortality. Somervell
John Gilpin. Cowen
Judith. Parry
Jesu, Priceless Treasure. Bach
Judas Maccabæus. Handel
Job. Parry
King Neptune's Daughter. Tozer
King Olaf. Elgar
King Saul. Parry
King's Error. Coward
The Kingdom. Elgar
Lauda Sion. Mendelssohn
Last Post. Stanford
Lord Ullin's Daughter. MacCunn
Last Judgment. Spohr
Mass in C. Mozart
Mass in D. Beethoven
Magnificat. Bach
Mass in B minor. Bach
Messiah. Handel
Martyr of Antioch. Sullivan
May Queen. Bennett
Midsummer Night's Dream. Mendelssohn
Meg Blane. Coleridge-Taylor
May Day. Macfarren
Magna Charta. Coward
Mount of Olives. Beethoven
North-East Wind. Cliffe
North-East Wind. A. M. Smith
Nanie. Brahms
Ode to Music. Parry
Ode on St. Cecilia's Day. Handel
Ode on St. Cecilia's Day. Van Bree

Ode on St. Cecilia's Day. Parry
Orpheus. Gluck
Omar Khayyam. Bantock
Ode to the Passions. Cowen
Phaudrig Crohoore. Stanford
Psalm 115. Mendelssohn
Psalm 42. "
Psalm 114. "
Psalm 95. "
Psalm 43. "
Pan. Harriss
Praise Thou the Lord. Bach
Paradise and the Peri. Schumann
Psyche. Gade
Passion. Haydn
Pied Piper. Parry
Power of Sound. Somervell
Ruth. Gaul
Rock of Ages. J. F. Bridge
Rose Maiden. Cowen
Rose of Life. Cowen
Requiem. Mozart
Requiem. Brahms
The Revenge. Stanford
Return of Tobias. Haydn
Requiem. Verdi
Spectre's Bride. Dvorak
Spring's Message. Gade
Saint Mary Magdalene. Stainer
Sing Ye to the Lord. Bach
St. Matthew Passion. Bach
Sleepers Wake. Bach
Sands of Dee. Harriss

Stabat Mater. Rossini
Stabat Mater. Dvorak
Sea Drift. Delius
St. Paul. Mendelssohn
Song of Destiny. Brahms
Swan and Skylark. A. Goring Thomas
Seasons. Haydn
Song of Darkness and Light. Parry
Samson. Handel
Sun God's Return. Mackenzie
Story of Bethany. Coward
Samson and Delilah. Saint-Saens
Song of the Storm. Weingartner
Tannhauser. Wagner
Te Deum. Dvorak
Te Deum. Berlioz
Taillefer. Strauss
Triumphlied. Brahms
Tubal Cain. Coward
Twelfth Mass. Mozart
Wanderer's Song of the Storm. Strauss

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